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PAPERS

*Nurturing Spirituality in Healthcare Chaplaincy*



## **Spirituality in humanist chaplaincy: theoretical and empirical perspectives**

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Dutch chaplains work in an increasingly secularized society. Nowadays, the majority of the Dutch population is not affiliated to a religious community. Compared to other European countries, the Netherlands has a relatively long and strong tradition of humanist chaplaincy: since the 1950's, humanist chaplains work in prisons, the military and healthcare institutions alongside chaplains with a religious affiliation. The central question in this paper is how to understand the role of spirituality in humanist chaplaincy. We address this question both from theoretical and empirical perspectives. For the theoretical reflection, we draw from philosophical ideas by Taylor (1989, 2007) and Murdoch (1970) on the essential role of spirituality in the lives of all people, both religious and nonreligious. For the empirical reflection, we make use of the answers to a short questionnaire that we distributed among pioneering humanist chaplains (n=19) from different European countries who were gathered in Utrecht (the Netherlands) in 2015 for an exchange program on humanist chaplaincy. Analysing the answers to open ended questions like 'What are sources of inspiration in your work as a humanist chaplain?' and 'What does 'humanist' mean to you?' reveals how humanist chaplains describe the role of spirituality in their practices in a changing society.